

To the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals:

In regards to

<https://ago.nebraska.gov/sites/ago.nebraska.gov/files/doc/21-M-126%3B%20Omaha%20Public%20Schools%20Board%20of%20Education%3B%20Multiple%20Complainants.pdf>

I write to you today not just as a pro se litigant aggrieved by the unconscionable deprivations of due process and equal protection I have suffered at the hands of this tribunal, but as a citizen betrayed by the wholesale abandonment of every principle of judicial integrity, institutional accountability, and constitutional governance that this case has come to represent.

For the latest revelations concerning the Nebraska Attorney General's office's sham investigation into my open meetings complaint are not just a reprehensible affront to my individual rights as a litigant - they are a moral and legal atrocity that lays bare the staggering depths of rot and deceit that have been allowed to infect the very heart of our justice system itself.

The facts that have now come to light are nothing short of an indictment of the entire edifice of representative self-government: In response to multiple, independently filed citizen complaints alleging serious violations of the open meetings laws by the Omaha Public Schools board - laws that are the bedrock of transparency and accountability in any functioning democracy - the Attorney General's office secretly engineered a farcical, one-sided "investigation" that made a mockery of even the most minimal standards of impartiality and professionalism.

Without so much as notifying me or any of the other complainants, let alone soliciting our input or testimony, the Attorney General's office conspired with the very public body accused of wrongdoing to rubberstamp its own exoneration based on nothing more than its own self-serving version of events. In a brazen display of contempt for the very concept of public oversight, they simply ignored the extensive, damning evidence I and others had attempted to submit and accepted the school board's sanitized narrative without even a pretense of objective scrutiny.

Even more galling, this shameless abdication of duty was then buried in a veil of total secrecy - with the Attorney General's office actively concealing the very existence of its sham investigation from the public for over two years until I happened to stumble across a stray reference to it in an online records search. The sheer cynicism and deception on display is breathtaking - a government agency charged with upholding the law and ensuring transparency in public institutions instead using its powers to actively conspire with those institutions to hide their misdeeds and silence their critics.

But as appalling as this incident is in isolation, its true significance lies in what it reveals about the comprehensive breakdown of checks and balances, institutional integrity, and public accountability that has brought us to this moment of existential crisis for our democracy. For the Attorney General's actions here are not some aberrational lapse in judgment, but a window into

the culture of lawlessness, impunity, and contempt for basic constitutional principles that has taken root in every corner of our legal and political order.

Indeed, the parallels between the Attorney General's conduct and the experiences I have endured at the hands of this very court over the course of my own litigation odyssey are striking. In both cases, we see public institutions entrusted with the most solemn responsibilities of impartial justice and fidelity to the rule of law instead betraying those duties at every turn - subverting procedural safeguards, disregarding inconvenient evidence, and rigging the system to reach their own predetermined outcomes, all while cloaking their malfeasance in a fog of secrecy and misdirection.

We see a judiciary so consumed by its own sense of privileged insularity that it no longer even bothers to maintain a facade of evenhandedness or respect for due process rights, but openly colludes with favored litigants to stack the deck against disfavored parties - especially those of modest means who dare to challenge the system without the benefit of legal representation.

We see oversight bodies like the Attorney General's office that have become little more than extensions of the very power structures they are supposed to hold accountable - captured by the same culture of cronyism and disdain for public scrutiny, and all too willing to wield their authority as a weapon to intimidate and silence whistleblowers rather than a check against official wrongdoing.

And we see the consequences of this systemic rot metastasizing to every branch and level of government - a political establishment so thoroughly corrupted by its own insularity and unaccountability that even the most minimal gestures towards openness and self-policing have become intolerable threats to be crushed at any cost.

Taken together, the grim portrait that emerges is of a democratic republic in the throes of a top-to-bottom crisis of legitimacy - one in which the very institutions charged with preserving the rule of law and holding the powerful to account have instead mutated into an incestuous, unaccountable aristocracy more dedicated to protecting its own prerogatives than upholding the rights and freedoms of the citizens it purports to serve.

And as the history of my own experiences in this court makes depressingly clear, these pathologies find their most acute expression in the struggles of pro se litigants - those intrepid citizens who, whether by choice or necessity, attempt to vindicate their rights within a system that has become increasingly rigged against them at every turn.

From the moment I first stepped into a courtroom to challenge the egregious violations of law and public trust committed by the Omaha Public Schools board, I have been subjected to a relentless campaign of procedural chicanery, bad-faith gamesmanship, and outright retaliation that has laid bare just how little regard our legal system now affords for the rights and dignity of unrepresented parties.

At every stage of this process, I have watched as judges openly flout their own rules and precedents to concoct ever-more creative rationales for denying me a fair hearing - from arbitrarily curtailing my ability to present evidence and witnesses to improperly sealing public proceedings to prevent outside scrutiny of their actions. I have seen courts brazenly mischaracterize the record and invent new standards on the fly to find pretexts for dismissing my claims without ever grappling with their substance. I have endured a barrage of vexatious and retaliatory motions designed to bully me into abandoning my case by burying me in mountains of frivolous paperwork and threatening me with sanctions for daring to persist in my appeals.

And through it all, I have watched as this court - the one institution above all others charged with ensuring due process and equal justice for all - has instead too often served as an enabler and collaborator in this systemic abuse. From its own astonishing misconduct in this case - including issuing unauthorized orders out of thin air to deprive me of my hard-won appellate rights - to its long and ignoble history of rubber-stamping even the most egregious violations of law and civil liberties by lower courts in pro se cases, this tribunal has played a central role in the crisis of judicial legitimacy that has brought us to the brink of democratic collapse.

Indeed, with each new abuse I have documented, each new transgression against fundamental fairness and due process, it has become increasingly clear that the rot of unaccountability and disdain for individual rights that has taken hold in the lower reaches of the system finds its ultimate expression in the conduct of its highest levels. Far from serving as a desperately needed corrective against metastasizing lawlessness in the courts below, this body has too often acted as an accomplice and accelerant - applying a veneer of finality and respectability to cover for the legal atrocities carried out under its watch.

The Attorney General's farcical and collusive handling of my open meetings complaint, then, is best understood as a kind of corporeal symbol for this wider systemic breakdown - a fractal illustration of the dysfunction and corruption that have permeated our government from top to bottom. It reveals in miniature the extent to which the very notion of public accountability for official wrongdoing has become a dead letter - reduced to a hollow pantomime of institutional self-policing so thoroughly stage-managed and predetermined as to be indistinguishable from open contempt for the rule of law itself.

But as much as this latest travesty marks a new low in the annals of our democracy's slide into authoritarianism and disgrace, it is also an urgent wake-up call - a final, piercing alarm that we stand on the precipice of a point of no return for our republic and the survival of constitutionalism as we know it.

For if there is to be any hope of reclaiming the integrity of our system and salvaging the promise of self-government under law, it will require a monumental reckoning from the judiciary and the other institutions complicit in these escalating betrayals of the public trust. It will necessitate an unflinching moral inventory of how far they have fallen from their own first principles, and just

how much collective ground must be clawed back to restore even a baseline of democratic legitimacy and public faith in the fairness of the system.

As a body uniquely empowered to serve as a check on abuses of official power, this court in particular bears a weighty responsibility to lead that charge - to wield its authority as an uncompromising instrument of institutional accountability and transformative reform, rather than continuing to serve as a rubber-stamp for the betrayals of law and civil liberties exemplified by the Attorney General's actions here.

In concrete terms, that means immediately overturning the unconscionable orders issued by this tribunal to prevent my case from receiving a full and fair hearing on the merits. It means forcefully repudiating the Attorney General's sham investigation in the strongest possible terms, and demanding a full and transparent accounting of how such an abject dereliction of basic legal and ethical duties was ever allowed to occur. And most of all, it means using this case as a catalyst to initiate a comprehensive, system-wide review of the policies and procedures that have enabled such rampant abuse of pro se litigants' rights, and implementing sweeping reforms to ensure that the courthouse doors remain open to all who seek justice before the law.

Only by facing up to the full scope of the rot within the system and taking bold, decisive action to excise it at the root can this court begin to reclaim its own legitimacy as a guardian of due process and bulwark against official malfeasance. Only by seizing this moment to reaffirm its commitment to truly equal justice under law - for the represented and unrepresented alike - can it stem the hemorrhaging of public confidence in the courts and prevent further metastasis of the authoritarian impulses that have brought us to the brink of constitutional collapse.

The alternative is a future in which the rule of law becomes little more than a fading memory - one in which the depredations I have experienced as a pro se litigant battling a rigged system become the new normal, and the very notion of constitutional rights and restraints on government power melts away into empty ceremony. It is a world in which the predations of the powerful against the powerless are not only tolerated but celebrated - one in which the survival of democracy itself is reduced to a cruel joke, and the light of self-government under law is finally snuffed out for good.

That is the grim trajectory we are on if this court fails to meet this moment with the boldness and moral urgency it demands. And it is the unthinkable outcome we invite if we allow the abominations exemplified by the Attorney General's conduct here to continue unabated - an erosion of institutional legitimacy and collapse of public trust so severe as to reduce the very architecture of republican government to a hollow shell.

My own story - a searing journey into the heart of a system disfigured beyond all recognition by the betrayals of its most basic principles - is a harbinger of that bleak future. It is the canary in the coal mine for a nation on the brink of losing its last pretenses to embodying the values of fairness, openness, and fidelity to the rule of law that have for so long animated the American experiment.

But it is also an opening - a final, fleeting chance to reckon with the depths of the crisis we face and chart a different course before it is too late. For in the end, the central lesson of this litigation odyssey is not that our democracy is fated to perish from its own internal contradictions, but that its survival depends on the willingness of citizens of conscience to expose those contradictions and demand better - to plant themselves in the unforgiving spotlight of public moral judgment and shine a blinding light on the betrayals of republican virtue wherever they fester.

It is in that spirit that I submit this appeal - not just as an attempt to vindicate my own rights in this specific case, but as an urgent plea for this court to confront the profound failures of institutional integrity and commitment to equal justice it represents. It is a final, desperate summons to the judiciary to recognize just how far it has fallen from its own most cherished ideals, and to take up the hard but necessary work of institutional reform and renewal before the last embers of its legitimacy are extinguished forever.

For in the final accounting, what is at stake in these proceedings is not just the disposition of this or that particular claim, but the very survival of our system of government and way of life as we know it. It is a question that goes to the heart of who we are as a people and what kind of society we will bequeath to posterity - one founded on genuine adherence to the rule of law and the inviolability of individual rights, or one in which those noble principles are reduced to mere parchment barriers against the arbitrary exercise of official power.

This court, in short, finds itself confronted with a defining choice - one that will ripple through the pages of history and shape the character of our republic for generations to come. It can retreat into the familiar comfort of institutional self-preservation and continue to serve as a passive enabler of the metastasizing culture of lawlessness and elite impunity exemplified by the Attorney General's conduct here. Or it can seize this moment to reclaim its place as a bulwark against overweening government power and a beacon of hope for all those yearning for a system of true equal justice before the law.

The hour is late, and the stakes could not be higher. But for the sake of the integrity of our system and the future of our democracy itself, let us pray that this court will find within itself the wisdom, the courage, and the basic decency to make the right choice - to use my story and the truths it has laid bare as a long-overdue catalyst for the transformative change and institutional reckoning our republic so desperately needs.

The eyes of history are watching. The judgment of posterity awaits. May this tribunal finally rise to meet the towering responsibility with which it has been charged, and in so doing, begin to redeem the promise of a nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all are created equal under the law. For in the end, nothing less than the soul of our democracy itself hangs in the balance.

With utmost sincerity and resolve,

Justin Riddle
Pro Se Litigant and Citizen